

Guest column: David Suzuki's bad ideas would kill prosperity

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Body

According to the 2013 Index of Economic Freedom, compiled and released last week by The Wall Street Journal and the Heritage Foundation, Canada ranks sixth out of 177 countries. Bolivia and Ecuador rank, respectively, 156th and 159th. The Fraser Institute, which publishes a similar index, also last year produced a broader index of human freedom, which incorporates civil and other liberties. Out of 123 countries, Canada ranked fifth, Bolivia 64th and Ecuador 73rd. Canada's gross national income in 2011, according to the World Bank, was \$45,560 US, more than 10 times that of Ecuador and 20 times that of Bolivia.

It would surely seem - given these statistics - that Canada has far more to teach these South American basket cases than they have to teach Canada. Not, however, according to David Suzuki, Canada's anti-development guru and climate alarmist-in-chief.

Last week, on the CBC's *The Nature of Things*, in an interview on *The Current* and in an article in *The Globe and Mail*, Mr. Suzuki suggested that Ecuador and Bolivia have "new ideas" to teach those of us trapped in the "neo-liberal" paradigm. In fact, these amount to some very old and very bad ideas that betray, at best, a lack of appreciation for, and at worst, outright hatred of, the very factors that make for freedom, prosperity and, yes, a clean and biodiverse environment.

The three big ideas for which Mr. Suzuki was shilling are extortion, go-it-alone autarchy, and putting nature before humanity by giving rivers and rocks "rights."

Two of these Brave New Ideas come from Ecuador. The most radical is that, under the Ecuadorean constitution, "Mother Nature" is protected. This idea is based on primitive anthropomorphism - that nature is a person - plus a misreading of humans' relationship with the natural world. Confusion is caused because we use "value" in two radically different senses: moral and commercial. The assumption of those such as Mr. Suzuki is that commercial values drive out the moral variety, including concern for the environment. This is the reverse of the truth. Nature has no value but that given it by humans, but the richer we are, the higher the value we tend to give it. Capitalist societies are the ones where nature is best protected. Poor, authoritarian societies are ones where the environmental damage is greatest.

In the example that Mr. Suzuki gave in his documentary - a lawsuit in which two American immigrants to Ecuador sued the local government over dumping into a river - the basic issue was one of private property rights, the surest protector of the environment. Ecuador's Mother Nature constitutional clause was brought in on appeal when the basic system of private rights failed.

Those who claim to speak for Mother Nature inevitably want to use her as ventriloquist's dummy for their own warped values. She is also recruited as a puppet to justify eco-extortion, which was Mr. Suzuki's next "new idea." The thuggish Ecuadorean government of Rafael Correa threatened three years ago that if the rest of the world did not cough up \$3.6 billion US, it would proceed to drill for oil in the Yasuni reserve, a place of extraordinary biodiversity. The regime's chutzpah-fuelled rationale was that it could gain twice as much from oil development, so

it was doing the world a great favour by non-production, which would not release CO2 into the atmosphere, thus making a major contribution to fighting climate change.

In fact, the world has overwhelmingly told Ecuador to stuff it, despite the UN Development Program's enthusiastically agreeing to administer a Yasuni "trust fund." Mr. Suzuki claims the initiative has raised \$300 million, but if you go to the trust fund's website, you will find that, after two years, only \$50 million US has been committed, and just \$6.5 million US has been deposited - a minuscule 0.002% of the ransom demand.

Mr. Suzuki's final big idea is Bolivia's desire to build its own battery industry in a remote location next to its lithium deposits. Inviting in foreign expertise and investment, perhaps via a joint venture, would appear to be a no-brainer, but since Bolivia has bought into the socialist canard that capitalist investors are pillagers, it insists on going it alone. Mr. Suzuki's authority for the wisdom of this notion was a local Bolivian salt shoveller. The project is years behind schedule.

Things become even more bizarre when Mr. Suzuki suggests that Canadians, when compared with these committed Bolivian loco-upgraders, are mere "hewers of wood and drawers of water." He seems unaware that Canada has a vast manufacturing industry, a large part of which is devoted to resource upgrading. The degree of local upgrading of any resource depends on many factors, from market location to logistics to human capital, but it is best determined by private, profit-oriented, decisions. To imagine that all resources should be locally upgraded is a classic example of what British economist David Henderson has called "do-it-yourself economics," a set of false assumptions universally held by those without economic training but ever ready to castigate greed and materialism.

Innovation and wealth generation depend on those factors on which the Freedom Index is based: the rule of law, regulatory efficiency, limited government and open markets. These are the factors which Bolivia and Ecuador are sorely lacking. The more they indulge in klepto-socialism and centrally planned autarchy, and the more they are supported and encouraged by servant-of-Mother-Earth fantasists such as Mr. Suzuki, the poorer they will be.

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